



**Written Testimony Submitted to the Senate Committees on Education and Higher Education
on Behalf of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission re. Student Support Services**

October 28, 2020

The ISACorps, Diversity, Inclusion, and Representation in Education and Public Service Careers

Although not what we might traditionally think of as a reform to on-campus Student Services, we wanted to share recently compiled information on the extended or secondary impact of the Illinois Student Assistance Corps, a program of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC). Through the ISACorps, also known simply as the Corps, our agency hires recent college graduates and trains them to help students overcome barriers to education and training beyond high school. You can watch a very brief video about the Corps on ISAC's homepage (isac.org) or via YouTube at <https://youtu.be/3IJBE86X2sY>.

The ISACorps was created with a federal College Access Challenge Grant in 2008, with the first ISACorps cohort hired in June 2009. As that federal grant program expired, the funding to maintain the important work of the ISACorps has been transitioning to State support.

Many of you are familiar with the first goal of the Corps: to better serve potential college students, especially first-generation college students, by recruiting near-peer mentors with similar life experiences to help with the college admission and financial aid process. A second goal has been highlighted less often but may ultimately be just as important: to increase the representation of first-generation college students in education and public service careers.

If we are to help Illinoisans break cycles of poverty and of *lack* of access to opportunity, we must create conditions through which young people can both reach higher and steady the ladder for those behind them.

Representation and connections matter. For that reason, we emphasize particular priorities in the young people we hire and where we place them:

- In hiring, we prioritize young people who were the first in their families to attend college, are from Illinois, and attended college in Illinois.
- In placement, we prioritize matching Corps members with a region where they have lived, have attended school, or have another personal connection.

To date, 586 Corps members have been hired, of whom 88% completed their bachelor's degrees at Illinois institutions, and 54% attended Illinois public four-year institutions. While alumni of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign comprise the largest contingent of that group, 80% of Corps members who are Illinois public university graduates attended *other* Illinois public universities. This is significant because, when we seek connection and representation, it is important to be careful not to craft a single story. We cannot *only*

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tell stories of the path to the state flagship institution. We recruit individuals who can tell the stories of their path to and through all of our institutions, and our public fours, especially the directionals, are crucial to that. To honor the diversity of our students, we must recruit mentors that reflect that diversity.

Among the 2019 and 2020 cohorts of ISACorps members, 56% are first-generation college students. (In fact, all ISAC professional staff in the division of College Access and Outreach, which manages the Corps among other outreach initiatives, are first-generation college students.)

Compared to the Illinois population, racial/ethnic groups that currently lag in educational attainment are more strongly represented among Corps members. (The table at right uses U.S. Census Bureau categories that do not sum to 100%.)

	Illinois	ISACorps
Asian	6%	3%
White	72%	42%
Black	14%	23%
Hispanic	17%	32%

Representation matters. It matters when we recruit our ISACorps members, and it matters when they complete their service and move into their careers. **Consider a first-generation college student, a low-income college student, or an underrepresented college student. When they move into education careers, whether that is in K-12, higher ed, or public policy, their experiences are reflected in how and what they think about “student services.” A student who struggled, a student who was the first in their family, or a student who did not see themselves reflected in their college experience will have a different idea of what “student support” means.** They will bring a different voice to the proverbial table. Our alumni continue to serve students even after, and maybe even *more*, once they complete their service with the ISACorps.

Attached and in the video we link to above, you’ll find a representative sampling of where ISACorps alumni are now. Whether in policy positions or as practitioners, former Corps members continue to serve Illinois students and families in high schools; financial aid offices; college admissions, advising, or administration; other public service positions; and in higher ranking positions at ISAC. The Corps is not only helping high school students directly, but helping to change the face of education and public service in Illinois.

As we work to enhance professional development and networking opportunities for our Corps members to prepare them for their next steps in public service, we appreciate the support and partnership of the General Assembly.

If you would like to connect a constituent to free, one-on-one assistance with the college admission or financial aid processes, you can identify your local Corps members using the ZIP code search tool at <https://www.isac.org/isacorps>.

If you have questions about the Illinois Student Assistance Corps or other ISAC programs and services, please feel free to contact Katharine Gricevich, ISAC Director of Government Relations, at (217) 785-9278 or at katharine.gricevich@illinois.gov.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Where are ISACorps Alumni?

Examples of the education and service positions held by ISACorps Alumni

High Schools

- School Counselor - Beardstown Junior/Senior High School
- College and Career Coach - Chicago Public Schools (multiple)
- Director, College and Career Counseling - North Chicago Community High School
- Site Coordinator - Morton and Leyden High School, West 40 Intermediate Service Center
- Admissions Counselor - Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

College Financial Aid Offices

- Financial Aid Advisor - Western Illinois University
- Senior Financial Aid Administrator - University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
- Assistant Director, Financial Aid - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
- Assistant Director, Financial Aid - Lewis and Clark Community College

Institutional Research, Enrollment Management, Student Support Services

- Director of Research and Planning - Sauk Valley Community College
- Director of Recruitment and Outreach - Knox College
- Academic Advisor and Recruitment Coordinator, LARES - University of Illinois at Chicago
- Coordinator of New Student Programs, School of Engineering - University of Illinois
- Assistant Director of the Academic Resource Center, College of Engineering - University of Illinois at Chicago

Social and Community Services

- Human Services Caseworker - Illinois Department of Human Services
- Community Initiatives Coordinator - DuPage County Health Department
- Overnight Youth Care Worker - Mercy Home for Boys and Girls
- Immigration Specialist - International Rescue Committee
- Communication/Scholarship Administrator - Southeastern Illinois Community Foundation
- Associate Planner - Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Manager of Alumni Support - Gary Comer Youth Center
- Branch Director - Boys and Girls Clubs of America
- Southern Illinois Community Outreach Coordinator - Senator Tammy Duckworth
- Member Services Associate - National College Attainment Network

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